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Traditions and the Hero Personality Construction (Things Fall Apart as a model)

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Abstract

This paper represents a first attempt to study traditions and the personality construction of the hero in writing the novel. Philosophy of writing novels makes clear that a complete understanding of the novel requires data on both film and writing. Previous empirical work has dealt with the transfer of resources between the hero and the novel, either using data on the novel, or with data solely obtained from the hero. Using a novel things fall apart as a model, I study two types of novels: transfers to the author and the hero towards the personality' in the novel. I find evidence in support of the hero of transfer behavior, in that the novel tends to receive lower transfers, other things being equal. However, the results show that traditions and the personality construction of the hero are positively associated with the community and the weather surrounded. The estimation strategy controls for the effect of traditions and the personality construction of the hero and to distinguish between the hero and the writer in the novel.

Keywords: Traditions and the personality construction of the hero in writing the novel.

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1. Introduction

Okonkwo is the epitome of the Ibo culture. He is a great warrior, and has many titles. In part one of the book it is giving background information about the culture, traditions, and beliefs of the people, and how Okonkwo represents that.

At the end of part one he accidentally kills a young boy, and is exiled to his mothers homeland for seven years. In those seven years, the white missionaries come and try to convert people to their religion, and succeed in doing so with some people causing things to fall apart. In part three, it is apparent to the people of the clan that the white men had not only brought a religion but a government. Okonkwo and several others gather to plan a revolt, and messengers for the white men come and tell them to stop. Okonkwo kills the head messenger, and then for reasons the reader can only infer, hangs himself - an abomination to their people.

2. Discussion

Achebe's novel portrays the clash between the British colonial government and the traditional culture of the indigenous Ibo people. More importantly for this essay the novel depicts the rise and fall of the protagonist Okonkwo, a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan. Educated in Ibada, one of several universities implemented by the British colonial government, Achebe was afforded a unique insight into European and African perspectives of colonialism. Tired of the primitive European perception of „other“ cultures portrayed within the Western literary canon, Achebe sought to capture the African voice. His choice of language and decision to respond to earlier European accounts of Africa was thus political [7 : 7] . There are very few works not associated with the Western canon to have received as much attention as Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* Ogbaa [6 :1]. Subsequently, a vast number of scholarly texts surrounding the many different themes included within Achebe's novel have been written. However, contrary to the many post-colonial interpretations of this novel, this essay will employ a psychoanalytical literary approach to discuss the cause of the protagonist's eventual demise, based on the premise that human behavior is driven by an unconscious process. Consequently, this essay will argue that following the ego's inability to repress the infantile demands of the unconscious, the preconscious and the co conscious self, ever more compulsive, repetitive and neurotic behaviors are displayed. Subsequently, the protagonist's self-confidence turns to pride and his masculinity develops into totalitarian rule leading to uncontrollable rage, Okonkwo's world literally falls apart. It should be noted that for the purpose of this essay, I will limit my discussion to Freud's theory of the unconscious in my interpretation of the protagonist Okonkwo. Finally, it is my understanding that Okonkwo's relationship to his mother plays a significant role in explaining the tense relationship with his own father and sons. The analysis of this unique relationship will thus afford a more inclusive understanding of what I presume to be the protagonist's repressed true emotions. "Psychoanalytical criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature" Barry [1 : 96] . Psychoanalytic theory partly consists of Freudian theories relating the mind, our instincts and sexuality and is based on the premise that human behavior is driven by an unconscious process. This analysis will focus upon Freudian theories relating the interaction between what Freud himself termed the id, the ego, the superego and the unconscious. Furthermore, this essay will also utilize Anna Freud's theories relating human behavior and

defense mechanisms in order to better interpret some of the protagonist's unruly actions. The principal defense mechanisms identified by Freud and later refined by his daughter Anna, include repression, displacement, regression, projection, introjections and sublimation. However, although the use of defense mechanisms may be viewed as a universal phenomenon among a wide variety of individuals, "When carried to an extreme they lead to compulsive, repetitive and neurotic behaviour Feist, [3 : 34], which the protagonist, it will be argued, succumbs to all of the above. Due to the fact that we know very little relating to the protagonist's own childhood and considering that the ego "the only region of the mind in contact with reality [3: 29] , is to some extent the product of our social surroundings, it is relevant to include a summary of the plot and background information of the culture to which the protagonist was exposed. This will not only facilitate a better understanding of the protagonist as a whole, but will help to explain why Okonkwo fears the „unmanly“ reflection of his father, a man in conflict with the socially constructed masculine norms common to Ibo cultural traditions. Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* depicts the rise and tragic fall of a wealthy and respected warrior named Okonkwo. Dissimilar to early postcolonial primordial perceptions of Africa, the Ibo clan is culturally rich in tribal tradition and practices the worship of gods, communal living, war and magic. Leadership is based on an individual's personal worth, masculinity and contribution to the good of the Ibo tribe. Raised from humble beginnings it soon becomes apparent that the protagonist's strengths are also his weaknesses: his self-confidence turns to pride and his masculinity develops into totalitarian rule leading to uncontrollable rage. Haunted by the cowardly actions of his unmanly father Unoka, Okonkwo is determined to become everything his father never was: clansman, warrior and great leader. Okonkwo returns home from exile with hopes of reclaiming his former self, for "His life had been ruled by a great passion – to become one of the lords of the clan" . However, the village of Umuofia has drastically changed since the arrival of the Europeans and Okonkwo learns of his son, Nwoye's disgrace. Reflecting over the loss his son to the „effeminate“ men's religion, a fury rises within him as Okonkwo considers taking his machete to the „vile“ mans' church. Having avenged the blasphemous act of a convert by burning down the Christian church, Umuofians' are divided as to whether or not they should avenge the District Commissioners unjust treatment of the perpetrators. "Choked with hate" , Okonkwo has vowed, if need be, to oppose the white man alone. However, "for the first time in many years Okonkwo had a feeling that was akin to happiness... The clan which had turned false on him appeared to be making amends" . Nevertheless, following a village gathering to determine the future of Umuofia, the protagonist is forced to confront his greatest fear. Striking down but one of five court messengers, realising Umuofia would not go to war, the broken protagonist poses the questions, Why? "Why did he do it" . Why did he hate his father? Why did he beat his son? Why did his youngest wife fear him? Why did Ikemefuna show weakness and run? "Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice..." . The father of a twelve-year-old son named Nwoye, Okonkwo fears his son is unmanly and will end up a failure just like his father Unoka. The protagonist receives a generous loan of 800 yams in order to start a farm. Okonkwo's success, however, quickly begins to lead to his ultimate demise, as his behaviour becomes ever more obsessive. The protagonist's totalitarian style leadership and what I interpret to be the repression of his true emotions, embedded deep It is the protagonist's belief that the „Yam“ represents manliness and he who can provide for his family is surely a great man. However, similarly to the protagonist's father, Unoka, his son, Nwoye, shows "disquieting signs of laziness" , aggravating the protagonist's fear of the „unmanly“ reflection of his father in

his son. Within his unconscious mind, lead to many conflicts with other members of the village, but more importantly with his own family, who begin to fear him. During the week of peace, Okonkwo's hasty temper incites him to severely beat his youngest wife Ojiugo, breaking the traditions of the festival that strictly forbids any form of violence. However, Okonkwo commits his ultimate sin, following the sacrifice of his son Ikemefuna, which brings far-reaching consequences for him and his family. Interesting, following his son, Nwoye's conversion to the white man's religion, Okonkwo rejects the "effeminate" reflection of his father, now common to his son. Following the accidental death of a young boy, Okonkwo seeks refuge among his mother's kinsmen. However, during Okonkwo's absence Christian missionaries begin to arrive in Umuofia with the intention of converting the indigenous population to Christianity. Tension between the villagers and the missionaries finally explode when a Christian convert named Enoch eats a sacred python and publicly unmask an egwugwu (an assembly of tribesmen masked as spirits), an act equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. A young, physically strong and confident man whose "fame rested on solid personal achievements". Much-admired for his physical prowess in the ring, villagers still speak of Okonkwo's legendary wrestling attainments. In fact, based on his past successes, Umuofians award Okonkwo by appointing him leader of the emissaries of war to the neighboring village Mbano. On his arrival to the village of Mbano, Okonkwo is treated with great honor and respect. On his return, Umuofians entrust the great warrior, Okonkwo, with the custody of a young boy (Ikemefuna). The tragic demise of the former great Umuofian warrior and his Africa has in Achebe's novel been attributed to the tragic encounter between European and African societies. This essay however has focused upon Freudian theories of the unconscious mind in its interpretation of the protagonist, Okonkwo, and his eventual demise. According to Freud significant aspects of human behavior are dominated by repressed unconscious primitive impulses that lie beyond the consciousness. He believed that this unconscious material such as forgotten childhood trauma, hostile feelings towards a parent and repressed sexual desires were not only unattainable by the conscious psyche but responsible for much of our everyday behavior. Having analyzed the relationship between the protagonist and his mother, and the tormented relationship with his father, this essay sought to determine the interaction between what Freud himself termed the id, the ego and the superego, in order to explain some of the protagonist's unruly actions which, this essay has argued, lead to his eventual demise. Although we know Similarly, on starting a farm, Okonkwo, already a prestigious member of the community receives a generous loan of yams. Interestingly, the loan is given on the premise that unlike his fellow clansmen, Okonkwo will surely succeed and make good on his loan. This he does, despite the effects of a terrible drought. Undaunted by his humble beginnings and the devastating effects of nature, Okonkwo inevitably becomes one of Umuofias most respected and successful leaders. However, despite the novels introductory emphasis upon the masculine attributes and successes of this great Umuofian warrior, the anxiety caused by the distaste for his father is all too apparent. For "He had no patience with unsuccessful men, he had no patience with his father". Already, embedded within the third paragraph, we learn of the protagonist's distaste for his father; a distaste which motivates the protagonist to overcome his father Unoka's legacy. Cited throughout the first chapters it becomes apparent that Okonkwo's father, Unoka, represents all that the Ibo tribesmen abhor. A gifted musician that loves good fellowship, Unoka is portrayed as a man who lacks ambition, yet is gentle and sensitive to nature's ever changing beauty. However, Okonkwo's "life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness... It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father". It may be suggested that the citation above is an example of the fear and anxiety

that lay deep within the protagonist's unconscious psyche. Though what is the cause of Okonkwo's fear, his resentment, for despite his failings Unoka is a sensitive man and a loving father. "Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride". These are not the words of a resentful father, nor adversary, but rather a parent who despite his son's vengeful attacks offers him a loving, guiding and supporting hand, as any loving parent would. His advice, however, tries "Okonkwo's patience beyond words". In order to understand the root of Okonkwo's demise and the anxiety that lay deep within his unconscious psyche, we must first understand the relationship to both parents and in particular his mother which; when compared with the relationship between Okonkwo and his father, is set very much in the background. However, as noted earlier it is my understanding that Okonkwo's relationship to his mother plays a significant role in explaining the tense relationship with his own father and sons. Furthermore, the anxiety caused by the relationship to his mother will help to explain the cause of Okonkwo's compulsive, repetitive, and neurotic behavior, which ultimately leads to his downfall.

3. Conclusions

Okonkwo's personality does not change hugely during the entire novel, although his mental state does react more to the situations. He is emotionally shaken after he kills Ikemefuna, and aware of his emotional weakness. After he kills Ekeudu's son, he slowly sinks into despair during his exile. He is only given weak hope after talking to his uncle. He is vehemently opposed to the Christians, even more so when Nwoye converts. He becomes a little wiser, realizing that his own intemperance has made his sons weak. He is finally happy when the villager's burn down the church in Umuofia, but this revolution turns out to be short-lived.

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